

The Iceman Cutteth; Soule Was Cool

By TONY KELSO

Eden Soule would have hated it; this winter of 2005 that is.

Eden Soule was an ice dealer in the years around 1900 and he made his living from harvesting and selling ice to his Duxbury customers. He would have hated this winter because the combination of heavy snows and fluctuating temperatures would have been terrible for ice making from Duxbury's ponds.

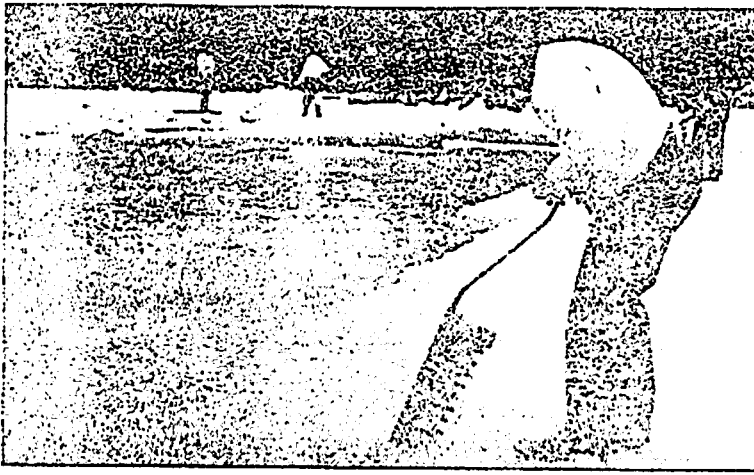
Names
& Places

Eden Soule lived in Millbrook in the big red farmhouse at 1372 Tremont Street and had a flourishing ice business by harvesting the ice from the pond at Millbrook and storing it in his icehouse that stood on the north shore of the pond. His horse-drawn ice wagons were well known all over Duxbury, since families and local businesses such as grocery stores relied on ice in the warmer months to keep perishable goods like butter, milk and meat fresh in their "iceboxes." Before electric refrigeration, iceboxes in the kitchen were a necessary and "modern" fact of life for households of 1900.

Ponds dot the Duxbury landscape, and one hundred years ago on every pond there stood an icehouse. The Merry family with their meat and milk business had an icehouse on Round Pond, off Mayflower Street. The Goodrich family had one for their duck farm on Taylor Street in West Duxbury. The Wright estate on St. George Street had an elaborate ice house worth more than some Duxbury houses.

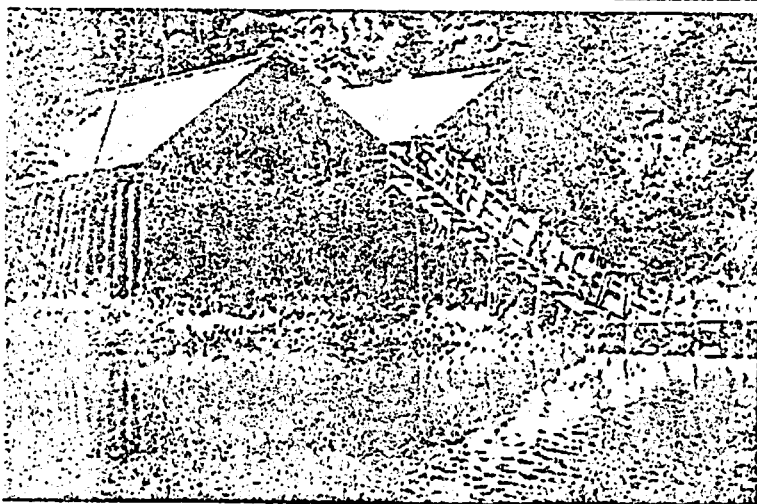
The icehouses are all gone now; fallen in, pulled down or burned. The longest-surviving icehouse in Duxbury was the most visible. It stood on Route 3A at the Mill Pond at the foot of the hill where Flintlock Drive now ascends. It was also one of the town's oldest icehouses. It was built prior to 1879 for the Loring family who had a mill and tack factory on the pond. It then passed to the Dawes family who owned the pond and much of the land in the area. The story is that the Dawes, who lived at 104 Tremont St. in the large yellow mansard roofed house, were to be given ice forever as owners of the pond. Supposedly this was the last house in Duxbury to change to electric refrigeration.

The last owners of the last icehouse in Duxbury were the Cushing family. Long after it



Harvesting ice at Millbrook Pond 1935.

MILLBROOK ICE WHOLESALE
SPRING WATER AND RETAIL
 Customers Promptly Attended To, At Moderate Prices
E. W. SOULE, Millbrook, Mass.



Ice house on Route 3A at Millpond

Photos courtesy of DR&HS from "Duxbury...An Album"

had outlived its usefulness, the icehouse on Mill Pond served as Duxbury's Motif #1, since it was painted by a number of local artists over the years. The icehouse was totally destroyed in a spectacular fire many Duxbury residents remember in May 1961.

Rev. Robert Canon Merry wrote in 1986 for the *Duxbury Clipper* about ice making production on Duxbury ponds during his childhood years. He wrote his father would recruit strong young men from the faculty at the Powder Point School to help with the heavy task of cutting ice. The ice needed to be between eight and 11 inches thick for proper ice production.

The horses wore special spiked shoes called "chaulks" for walking on the frozen pond. It was a disaster if a horse fell on the ice or into the pond. The horses pulled an ice plow that looked like a long cross cut saw with sharp steel blades. These were pulled across the ice several times to deepen the cuts to three inches and created a checkerboard pattern on the hard surface. Iron bars were then used to break the ice cakes apart and move them in groups towards the icehouse. Then the 300-lb. ice cakes were hoisted by means of a grappling hook, a series of pulleys and a horse along wooden chutes into the various levels of the icehouse. The danger came when an ice cake would buckle and the entire line of ice cakes would cascade back into the pond in frightening speed.

Ice harvesting, like crop harvesting, was intense work in a race against time when the weather cooperated. The ice was covered in two feet of sawdust to preserve it. Then the icemen like Eden Soule waited for warmer weather when their ice wagons would begin their rounds through the streets and lanes of Duxbury.

Ice harvesting was a major New England industry and fortunes were made and lost as ice was shipped from here to places as far away as India and the Caribbean. Duxbury's ice industry serviced the local summer and winter population, who depended on having their local ice delivered for their ice-boxes. But occasionally something went wrong.

Such was the case in the winter of 1906. Ice harvesting failed locally because of the unpredictable winter weather. Eden Soule thought fast; he got an icehouse built on the Duxbury Coal and Lumber wharf at Snug Harbor and then had 300 tons of ice harvested in Maine delivered by schooner by April. *The Old Colony Memorial* reported that he averted the "ice famine" that was the talk of the town, "although ice (prices) will be pretty high." Eden Soule's canny business sense saved his own livelihood and Duxbury's cool in 1906. Perhaps it was this quick thinking under pressure that made "Fire and Ice Soule" a good choice for Duxbury's second fire chief.